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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, February 22, 1934.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "George Washington and the Little French Girl."

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Today being a national holiday, I see no reason for talking about vitamins and calories and such important discoveries of modern times. Rather, let us turn back the pages of history to the time of George Washington and get a glimpse of family life at Mount Vernon as it was described by a little French girl.

In 1799 Adelaide-Rosalie was living with her mother in Virginia. Her father had fought with General Lafayette, and then returned to France. But let's read the letter that Adelaide-Rosalie wrote to her "revered grandmother," in France.

"Revered Grandmother," wrote the little French girl, "I am sure you will be glad to hear that at last I have seen and been spoken to by Monsieur de Washington. It happened in the following way: I was walking with Miss Elizabeth when we met him, riding his dark horse as usual. Another gentleman was with him. When I saw him I thought I would make use of the opportunity and so I called out in French: 'Bonjour, Monsieur le General!'

"He immediately stopped his horse and made a sign to Miss Elizabeth (who was all the time pulling at my skirt to keep me back) and to me to come up to him, which we did. He then said: 'You are a little French girl, I see. How do you come to be here?'

"Then I told him all about Monsieur mon Pere, how he had fought with Monsieur de La Fayette and then gone back to France, and how we were waiting with my Maman to join him there when things become more peaceful.... Monsieur de Washington smiled, and I could see the expression in his eyes. It was beautiful, and he appeared so kind and good. Then he turned to the man who was riding with him and said: 'What do you think? Shall we ask this little French girl to Mount Vernon and present her to Mistress Washington?' And when I heard him I almost cried out with joy, and said that my grandmother would be so happy if she knew I had really been in Monsieur le General's home.

"Well, then, we shall give her this happiness and you may write her that you have been to Mount Vernon,' and he added that he would send his carriage to fetch Miss Elizabeth and me that same evening. Then he bowed to us just as if we were great ladies, and Miss Elizabeth was so scared she could not even courtsey as she ought. But I did not forget to....

"About sunset a carriage arrived and took Miss Elizabeth and me to Mount Vernon. It is such a beautiful house and everything in it so beautiful. And just think, Monsieur de Washington met us himself and took us to Madame Washington! Miss Elizabeth could hardly walk for fright. But I looked at everything, and I saw that Monsieur le General was dressed quite plainly in a brown coat, but his cravat was very handsome, and he looked even more like a soldier than when he was on horseback. Madam de Washington was beautifully dressed in a heavy black silk.



The kerchief on her breast was of lace, and her cap suited her to perfection. The General said that if he had known a little French girl, and the daughter of a soldier who had fought with Monsieur de la Fayette, had been living so near him all this time, he would have had us come to see him before.....

"He is so good and he looks so good. Madam de Washington made us sit close to her easy chair and said we must have some refreshments. She ordered nice cakes brought to us, and some kind of bonbons I had never eaten before, and preserved cherries and jams, which, however, were not as good as my Maman makes.

"Before we were allowed to go home Monsieur le General told us that there would soon be a wedding at Mount Vernon, when his nephew, Monsieur Lewis, would marry Mademoiselle Custis, and that we must come and see the bride in her finery. Madam de Washington said that this was a very good idea, and that she would send her carriage to fetch us, and that we might spend the night in the room next to hers so she could take care of us. And she kissed me and Miss Elizabeth before sending us home, and Monsieur le General said he thought he could kiss me, too, as I was the daughter of one of his old comrades.

"When we got home, we could talk of nothing but our visit and the wedding which we are to see. And so, revered Grandmother, I think you will be glad to know that at last I was able to see Monsieur de Washington and write you all about him...."

Isn't that a delightful letter? The next letter was written in February, and in this letter Adelaide-Rosalie described the wedding of Monsieur Lewis and Mademoiselle Custis. I'm sure you'll be interested in learning that the bride wore a gown of white and silver brocade with large paniers. Perhaps you'd like to know, too, that Mistress Washington wore a soft dove-gray brocaded silk, with pink bows.

"Monsieur le General kissed the Bride affectionately," wrote the little French girl, "and there were tears in his eyes as he did so.... Her eyes, too, were filled with tears, and Madam de Washington was crying aloud."

And that, I think, proves that weddings haven't changed much, since the days of Monsieur le General George Washington.

Now let me read you a little something a friend of mine wrote for the Journal of Home Economics, two years ago:

"Aside from being a notable housekeeper and gracious hostess, Martha Washington is reputed to have attended personally to everything which was for the comfort of her husband. When he returned from long rides on the farm, she always met him with refreshments, frequently sugar cakes, thin biscuits, and hot mulled chocolate. Little wonder Washington found farm life at Mount Vernon preferable to all the activities and honors of the battlefield or council chamber.

"The person who has yet to make his first visit to this national shrine is to be envied, for it is an experience long to be remembered. Even the prosaic must catch a fleeting glimpse of crinoline in the box-wood garden, feel the velvet nose of a thoroughbred at the stable bars, hear from the spinet in the music room the sweet notes of 'Sally in Our Alley' or 'Brandywine Quickstep,' get tantalizing whiffs of woodcock roasting in the ample kitchen, and revert to 'long long thoughts' as he stands before the family tomb."

And so I leave you, until tomorrow -- when we'll go back to the practical job of keeping house and cooking three meals a day.

